

The Genocide in California's Closet
Robert Aquinas McNally
OLLI at UC Berkeley, Jan.–Feb. 2020

The course explores 19th-century California's long-ignored genocide against the state's Native peoples and examines the lasting lessons and effects of this dark history. It looks, too, at where we go from here, at how acknowledging this past can help redeem both present and the future.

Time & Place

Tuesdays, Jan. 21–Feb. 25, 2020, 1–3 p.m., University Hall 41B, 2150 Addison St., Berkeley, CA 94704

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Sources and Readings

Before each week's class, you'll receive suggested readings that will frame and deepen our sessions. Should you wish to obtain books on your own, key sources will be my book, *The Modoc War* (Nebraska, 2017); Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide* (Oxford, 2016); and Brendan Lindsay, *Murder State* (Nebraska, 2012).

Class Schedule

Jan. 21: The Genocidal Backstory to California's Only Indian War

Largely forgotten these days, the Modoc War of 1872–73 occupied the American public mind of the time, as it rattled the second Grant Administration, claimed the life of the only general officer to fall in a Western Indian war, and embarrassed the military with one stinging defeat after another. Yet, for all its drama, this fight was more than a strategic and tactical engagement. Behind and beneath it sits the reality of California's genocide.

Jan. 28: From Raphaël Lemkin to Spanish, Mexican, and American California

The word *genocide* entered the public lexicon only in the 1940s, when Polish lawyer Lemkin created the term to cover the particular variety of mass atrocity Nazi

Germany was visiting upon Europe. Genocide, though, has happened many times before, under different regimes and varying names. Using the legal concept of genocide as the context, we will set the stage by examining what occurred in California between first Spanish contact in 1769 and American annexation in 1846.

Feb. 4: Laying the Foundation

Genocides do not roll out full-blown. Rather, they move through stages that escalate from bigotry, dehumanization, and discrimination to mass murder and, ultimately, denial. California's extermination campaign developed from racist attitudes against Natives imported by American emigrants, gave birth to laws that stripped Natives of legal and political rights, and led to Gov. Peter Burnett's declaration of a war of extermination backed by \$40+ million in state bonds.

Feb. 11: Death by a Thousand Massacres

The California genocide operated through vigilante posses, state-funded militias, and Regular Army units that attacked Native settlements, then force-marched survivors to federal reservations featuring concentration-camp conditions. At the same time, mining, logging, farming, and ranching killed the game and fish, fouled the water, and altered the pastures and woodlands that supported Native communities. Imported diseases, too, took a toll. By 1900, approximately 90% of the original Indigenous population had been wiped out.

Feb 18: Erasure, from Yosemite to Modoc Skulls and Ishi

The genocide extended beyond physical extermination to eliminate the cultural evidence and memory of California's original inhabitants. This effort included displaying the remains of dead Natives as "specimens of natural history" in museums to renaming landscape features from Yosemite to Mt.Lassen and creating the public fallacy of the vanishing Native.

Feb. 25: Rebound, Resilience, Amends, Alliance

Despite the genocide, California is now home to the largest Native population of any U.S. state or territory and is witnessing an Indigenous cultural, political, and economic renaissance. This course-concluding session looks at contemporary Native California and asks what non-Native people can do to address the state's past and redeem its present and future.